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SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: PRO-KURDISH PARTY: A FRESH APPROACH TO GAINING
POLITICAL TRACTION

REF: A. ADANA 078

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1449

[1](#)C. 06 ISTANBUL 2013

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Kurdish nationalist Democratic Society Party (DTP) is running one "independent" candidate from each of Istanbul's three electoral districts; the party claims each is likely to attract enough support to gain seats in parliament. Nationwide, 40% of the party's candidates are women, 12 of whom have a good chance of winning seats. Though disappointed with what they view as efforts to suppress voter turnout, leaders say they will contest the election in a constructive manner. DTP claims that a resolution of the "Kurdish problem" would have economic, social and political benefits for all Turks. As observers in the Socialist Internationale (SI), they think their natural ally should be SI member the Republican Peoples Party (CHP), but nothing could be further from reality. Once in parliament, DTP plans to back the Justice and Development Party's (AKP's) attempts to establish political stability after the elections. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On June 13 we met Dogan Erbas, who recently resigned as chairman of DTP's Istanbul branch to run as an independent in the July parliamentary elections. He rehearsed general DTP strategy and the number of seats DTP expects to have in the new parliament in comments that tracked closely with those given to Consulate Adana (Ref A). He expects DTP-backed candidates to do well in the July 22 parliamentary elections, despite legislative measures -- such as the ten percent threshold and efforts to prohibit or complicate independent candidacies -- that he described as intended to restrict Kurdish political participation. The party is backing one candidate in each of Istanbul's three electoral districts, a move that will likely ensure each of them a seat in the next parliamentary session. Forty percent of DTP's candidates nationwide are women, 12 of whom have a high chance of winning, he said.

DIRTY TRICKS?

[1](#)3. (C) Erbas enumerated several "disappointments" in the campaign season thus far: muftis had visited villages in the southeast in the company of the district governor or deputy governor indicating persons whom villagers should not support in the upcoming election. Special security zones announced the week of June 10 to combat terrorism in the southeast would make campaigning more difficult in those areas. Erbas

also viewed the military's June 7 Internet posting urging the Turkish nation to display a "mass resistance against terrorism" as a departure from neutrality in the elections meant to stir mass rallies inspired by a nationalist edge (Ref B). Istanbul NGOs were already planning a mass gathering for June 23. He recounted an incident in Adapazari, an industrial town 100 miles east of Istanbul, in early June when a crowd accosted two road construction workers, one of whom sported a T-shirt with a photo of dissident Kurdish singer Ahmet Kaya. The two natives of the southeast needed police protection from a "huge mob that gathered," according to the June 6 Turkish Daily News. (Note: Erbas told us the T-shirt featured an American theme. End note.)

TRYING TO JOIN THE MAINSTREAM?

14. (C) Erbas claimed the party constantly sought dialogue with the government, even holding meetings in the capital in March, hoping to snag an appointment or two. They were frustrated. Nevertheless, he claimed, the party is committed to the democratic process and refrains from aggravating the situation, including by contesting - not boycotting - the July 22 vote. DTP strives to take a holistic approach to their problems. The party seeks human rights for Kurds and all minorities. Philosophically, DTP views this push for rights as an effort on behalf of all Turks. He noted DTP has not self-identified itself as an ethnic party. They argue a solution to the Kurdish problem would save public expenditures by lowering military budgets, improving the ability to fight unemployment and addressing the problem of mass urbanization; villagers would stay in peaceful areas instead of moving to the city. A solution to the Kurdish problem would also address Turkey's main international

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headache, Northern Iraq, he argued.

15. (C) Erbas said the left-of-center DTP, holding observer status in the Socialist Internationale, should get along well with the Republican Peoples Party (CHP), an SI member. However, nothing could be further from the truth. DTP stood for "freedom-based secularism" but unfortunately, Turkey's secular base was not so democracy-centered and routinely attached to its "natural (now often nationalist-leaning base."

16. (C) A confident DTP has considered possible parliamentary alliances (though it is unlikely other parties would want to enter into a formal relationship with the DTP due to its PKK associations). The party had been encouraged by Democrat Party leader Mehmet Agar's October 2006 statement on bringing employment to those in the mountains but he had recently begun to change his tune. Erbas wondered if Agar considered it a danger to himself to talk peace, Erbas wondered. CHP is out of the question, while arch-conservative Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) is unthinkable as an alliance party. But Justice and Development (AKP) is another matter. DTP, "along with western democrats," had been pleasantly surprised by AKP's positive use of democratic solutions, according to Erbas. He noted that PM Tayyip Erdogan sometimes appeared to vacillate, perhaps in an attempt to reach a balance of power. Nevertheless, AKP presented the best possibility for political cooperation and DTP's representatives in the new assembly anticipate helping AKP "maintain political stability in Turkey," including with respect to the upcoming presidential election and other challenges.

17. (C) Comment. One of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's lawyers, Dogan Erbas is no stranger to Kurdish objectives and politics -- and conflicts. His arguments mirror those we've heard from other politically active Kurds in Istanbul (Ref C). At this point, incremental improvements in human rights and economic opportunity seem to be their goal. End comment.

JONES